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program, a computer-readable recording medium storing the program, a network system, each of which allows desired contents to be selected easily even if contents are located at a plurality of stations in a dispersed manner.

5 In order to solve the aforementioned problems, a content selection method, according to the present invention, in which a content selection requesting station selects from among a plurality of content providing stations, includes the steps of: the content selection requesting station storing a
10 selection rule regarding the content providing stations; the content selection requesting station receiving a content selection request entered by an operator; the content selection requesting station selecting one of the content providing stations in accordance with the selection rule; and
15 the content selection requesting station transmitting the content selection request to the thus selected one of the content providing stations.

 With this arrangement, when the operator enters the content selection request into the content selection requesting
20 station, the content selection requesting station selects a content in one of the content providing stations in accordance with the selection rule. Thus, the operator is only required to know which content he wants to select, and is not required to know which station has the content he wants to select. Thus,
25 it is possible to select the desired content easily even if the

CLAIMS

1. A content selection method in which a content selection requesting station selects from among a plurality of content providing stations, comprising the steps of:

the content selection requesting station storing a selection rule regarding the content providing stations;

the content selection requesting station receiving a content selection request entered by an operator;

the content selection requesting station selecting one of the content providing stations in accordance with the selection rule; and

the content selection requesting station transmitting the content selection request to the thus selected one of the content providing stations.

2. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the step of:

sending back a content held by the content providing station, from the content providing station that has received the content selection request, to the content selection requesting station.

3. The method as set forth in Claim 2, comprising the steps of:

the content selection requesting station storing information for specifying a content providing station and an associated content that have been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station; and

5 the content selection requesting station resuming, in accordance with the information, connection with the content providing station and the associated content that have been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station.

10 4. The method as set forth in Claim 2, comprising the step of:

the content selection requesting station storing information for specifying a content providing station that has
15 been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station;

the content providing station storing information for specifying an associated content that has been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station; and

20 resuming, in accordance with these sets of information, connection between the content selection requesting station and the content providing station that has been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station.

25 5. The method as set forth in Claim 4, wherein:

if explicitly disconnected by the content selection requesting station, or if having performed no video transmission to the content selection requesting station for a certain period from a last time the content providing station has performed video transmission to the content selection requesting station, the content providing station erases the information, which is stored by the content provided station, for specifying the content that has been most recently selected by the content selection requesting station.

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6. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein:

the content providing station transmits, to the content selection requesting station, information regarding a content that is to send back to the content selection requesting station.

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7. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein:

the content providing station transmits, to the content selection requesting station, information regarding a content that is available to be selected next by the content selection requesting station.

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8. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein:

the content providing station transmits, to the content selection requesting station, information regarding a content

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that is available to be selected by the content selection requesting station.

9. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

5 the selection rule regarding the content providing stations, which is stored in the content selection requesting station, is to reselect a content providing station that has been selected first, after all the content providing stations targeted for selection are selected.

10 10. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the steps of:

 if there still remains a content to select, the thus selected one of the content providing stations selecting, in
15 accordance with a predetermined content selection rule, a content to select next, and the thus selected one of the content providing stations transmitting what is contained in the content to select next, to the content selection requesting station; and

20 if there remains no content that is to select, the thus selected one of the content providing stations transmitting information that there remains no content to select.

25 11. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the steps of:

the content selection requesting station confirming (i) a communication state regarding communication between the content selection requesting station and the thus selected one of the content providing stations, and (ii) a response state regarding responding from the thus selected one of the content providing stations; and

if the communication state is less than a desired level, the content selecting requesting station selecting a content providing station to select next in accordance with the selection rule regarding the content providing stations.

12. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein:

the content providing station confirming (i) a communication state regarding communication between the content providing station and a content that is to send back and (ii) a response state regarding responding with respect to the content that is to send back; and if the communication state is less than a desired level, the content providing station sending back a content that is to be selected next in accordance with a predetermined content selection rule.

13. The method as set forth in Claim 2, comprising the step of:

in the case where bandwidth available for communication between the content selection requesting

station and the content providing station is narrower than bandwidth necessary for transmitting a content that the content providing station is about to send back, the content providing station transmitting a content that is to be selected next to the content that the content providing station is about to send back, in accordance with the a predetermined content selection rule.

14. The method as set forth in Claim 2, comprising the step of:

in a state where a content that the content providing station is about to send back is in use, the content providing station sending back a content that is to be selected next to the content that the content providing station is about to send, in accordance with a predetermined content selection rule.

15. The method as set forth in Claim 14, wherein:

the state where the content is in use is a state where the content is being used by another content selection requesting station, or a state where a user on the content providing station side is using the content without using the content selection requesting station.

16. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the

step of:

the content selection requesting station confirming (i) a communication state regarding communication between the content selection requesting station and the thus selected one of the content providing stations, and (ii) a response state regarding responding from the thus selected one of the content providing stations; and

if the communication state is less than a desired level, the content selection requesting station providing, to the operator, information that the communication state is less than the desired level.

17. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the steps of:

the content providing station confirming (i) a communication state regarding communication between the content providing station and the content thus selected, and (ii) a response state regarding responding with respect to the content thus selected;

if the communication state is less than a desired level, the content providing station transmitting, to the content selection requesting station, information that the communication state is less than a desired level;

the content selection requesting station receiving the information; and

the content selection requesting station providing, to the operator, information that the communication state between the content providing station and the content thus selected is less than a desired level.

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18. The method as set forth in any one of Claims 11, 12, 16, and 17, wherein:

the state where the communication state is less than a desired level is a state where communication is possible but one of electric wave strength, the response state, and a communication error ratio is less than the desired level.

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19. The method as set forth in any one of Claims 11, 12, 16, and 17, wherein:

the state where the communication state is less than a desired level is (i) a state where a station at the other end is not turned on, (ii) a state where no response is received because the station at the other end becomes too distant, or (iii) a state where the thus selected one of the content providing stations is physically disconnected from the content.

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20. The method as set forth in Claim 16, wherein:

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in providing, to the operator, information that the communication state between the content selection requesting

station and the selected one of the content providing stations is less than the desired level, when the communication level is as such,

5 the content selection requesting station distinctly informing the operator whether the communication state is (A) a communication state where communication is possible but one of electric wave strength, the response state, and a communication error ratio is less than the desired level, or (B) a communication state where (i) a station at the other end
10 is not turned on, (ii) no response is received because the station at the other end becomes too distant, or (iii) the content is physically disconnected.

21. The method as set forth in Claim 17, wherein:

15 in providing, to the operator, information that the communication state between the content selection requesting station and the content thus selected is less than the desired level, when the communication level is as such,

20 the content selection requesting station distinctly informing the operator whether the communication state is (A) a communication state where communication is possible but one of electric wave strength, the response state, and a communication error ratio is less than the desired level, or (B) a communication state where (i) a station at the other end
25 is not turned on, (ii) no response is received because the

station at the other end becomes too distant, or the content is physically disconnected.

22. The method as set forth in Claim 1, comprising the
5 steps of:

transmitting a content switching instruction to the content selection requesting station in accordance with an entry of the operator; and

10 transmitting the content switching instruction from the content selection requesting station, which has received the content switching instruction, to a content providing station.

23. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

15 the content selection requesting station includes means which controls switching of an external connection device for a display device on which the content received by the content selection requesting station is to be displayed;

20 if the content selection requesting station is selected as the external connection device for the display device when the content selection requesting station receives the content selection request entered by the operator, the content selection requesting station performs content selection; and

25 if all contents are selected once, or if a station other than the content selection requesting station is selected as the external connection device for the display device, the

switching of the external connection device is carried out.

24. A content selection method in which in accordance with a request from a content selection requesting station, a content providing station sends back a content that the content providing station has, the method comprising the steps of:

the content providing station storing a control signal for the content that the content providing station has; and

if a content to send back is not available for viewing, the content providing station transmitting the control signal to the content so as to cause the content to be available for viewing.

25. A content selection method in which in accordance with a request from a content selection requesting station, a content providing station sends back a content that the content providing station has, the method comprising the steps of:

the content providing station storing a control signal for the content that the content providing station has; and

when a content to send back is changed from a first content to a second content, the content providing station transmitting a control signal to the first content so as to cause the first content to be not in use.

26. A content selection requesting station which selects a desired content from among contents that a plurality of content providing stations have, wherein:

5 the content selection requesting station transmits a content selection request to the content providing station according to the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25.

10 27. A content providing station which, when selected by a content selection requesting station, transmits, to the content selection requesting station, what is contained in a content that the content providing station has, wherein:

15 the content providing station receives a content selection request from the content selection requesting station according to the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25.

20 28. A content switching instruction device for use in the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25, which transmits, to a content selection requesting station, a content switching instruction given by an operator.

25 29. The content switching instruction device as set forth in Claim 28,

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the content switching instruction device transmitting the content switching instruction given by the operator, without using the content selection requesting station.

5 30. A program for causing a computer to implement the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25.

10 31. A computer-readable recording medium storing a program for causing a computer to implement the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25.

15 32. A network system structured by having a plurality of the content selection requesting stations as set forth in Claim 26, and a plurality of the content providing stations as set forth in Claim 27, and by using the method as set forth in any one of Claims 1 to 25.